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ABSTRACT

Noting the importance of communication to the socialization process of individuals entering organizations, this paper examines how individuals move through different communication modes and make use of different communication skills as they progress from newcomers to organizational members. To accomplish this, the paper uses aspects of interpersonal relationship theory to understand uncertainty reduction in the phases of socialization and then reviews the literature on the phases of organizational socialization, using these phases to develop a model of communication movement in the organizational process. The paper also presents specific skills that facilitate an individual's successful integration into an organization and discusses the implications of the model for both organizations and the rhetorical criticism branch of the field of speech communication. (FL)

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COMMUNICATION MOVEMENT IN THE ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION PROCESS

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Abstract

When individuals first enter organizations, they are faced with the task of making sense out of a new organizational environment. Individuals seem to accomplish a successful transition from outsider to insider by moving from an intrapersonal communication mode to an interpersonal communication mode and eventually to an organizational communication mode. This paper looks at the role of communication in the individual's quest to learn the organization's culture and his or her role within it. A model is provided and specific skills are presented which will facilitate the individual's successful integration into the organization. Implications for the model in both organizations and the rhetorical criticism branch of the field of speech communication are discussed.

COMMUNICATION MOVEMENT IN THE ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION PROCESS

As early as 1958 Robert Dubin suggested that turning "citizens into employees" (p. 90) required the development of a relationship between an individual and the organization. He further proposed that it was necessary to recognize the impact of the individual self-image composed of past social and work experiences and schooling. The idea of the individual self-image and its impact on the working relationship was reiterated by Pfiffner and Sherwood (1960) in discussing Bakke's idea of fusion between an individual and an organization. More recent studies have labeled this process as organizational socialization, or the path by which individuals move from outsider to insider in any organization. Whether the process is labeled organizational entry (Wanous, 1977), socialization (Jablin, 1982, 1984; Van Maanen, 1976; Van Maanen and Schein, 1979) or sense-making (Louis, 1980), all are concerned with understanding the phenomenon of how a newcomer becomes an accepted organizational member. For the most part, the earlier studies have focused on the organizational perspective (Feldman, 1976; Schein, 1968; Van Maanen, 1976) by defining socialization as the process by which new members are taught to adapt to an already present organizational culture and learn their individual roles within it. Other studies have recognized the need to focus on the individual perspective (Jablin, 1982, 1984; Louis, 1980; Wanous,

1977; Weiss, 1978; Wilson, 1984), although few of these have dealt specifically with how individuals accomplish successful transitions communicatively.

Communication is vital to the success of the socialization process; it is important, therefore, to focus specifically on how individuals move through different communication modes and make use of different communication skills to assist them in their transition from newcomer to organizational member. It is thus the purpose of this paper to focus on the individual in an attempt to pinpoint the communication modes and skills that may be used to promote a smooth, successful transition. This will be done by 1) utilizing aspects of interpersonal relationship theory to understand uncertainty reduction in the phases of socialization, and 2) reviewing the literature on the phases of organizational socialization and using these phases to develop a model of communication movement in the socialization process. This model will suggest that individuals accomplish transition by moving from communication mode to communication mode, with each mode requiring specific commmunication skills. The implications of this model, both for organizations and for the field of speech communication, will also be discussed.

Uncertainty Reduction and Phases: A Comparison

Because similarities exist between interpersonal relationship development and the socialization process (Wilson, 1984), we would

be remiss if we did not use the former to attempt greater understanding of the latter. The literature on interpersonal relationship theory suggests that individuals are initially concerned with uncertainty reduction (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Berger & Bradac, 1982) and that individuals use various strategies to reduce that uncertainty. Ingratiation (Baxter & Philpott, 1982), compliance-gaining (Sillars, 1980), and exchange of information and self-disclosure (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Glaser, 1980) are some of the strategies most often used to seek out information that allows individuals to make predictions. The interpersonal literature further suggests that the process of interpersonal relationship development occurs in phases (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Knapp, 1978; Wood, 1982) and that the movement from one phase to another is dependent on how much cognitive and behavioral uncertainty has been reduced (Berger & Bradac, 1982) through the accumulation of information. This movement appears to be closely linked to a person's ability to obtain such information through communication.

In the same way that two persons initiate contact, learn about each other, and commit themselves to one another at varying levels of intimacy, individuals also initiate contact with an organization, learn the rules of the organization and share information about self, as well as commit themselves to organizational goals at varying levels of loyalty. Organizational

research suggests that in the development of this working relationship, uncertainty reduction is the individual's primary concern (Weiss, Ilgen & Sharbaugh, 1982). When a person begins a new job, she/he experiences personal uncertainty due to changes in professional identity, in status, in role, and in working conditions. Furthermore, she/he must cope with organizational uncertainty in the form of functional, hierarchical, and inclusionary boundaries and rules that differ from organization to organization (Louis, 1980). In fact, in developing his model of organizing, Weick (1979) proceeded from the assumption that it is the communicating activity among individuals seeking to reduce uncertainty that forms the basis of organizing.

The uncertainty reduction strategies most often available to new employees are information-seeking and boundary-spanning activities (Leifer & Huber, 1977), but it seems feasible to consider that self-disclosure, ingratiation, and compliance-gaining strategies are also used. A perusal of the literature indicates little has been done to determine if this is so. What the organizational literature does do is make a clear distinction between uncertainty as an attribute of the physical environment and uncertainty as an attribute of the individual perception. Downey, Hellriegel and Slocum (1975) indicated that "perception of uncertainty can be considered as an individual psychological trait rather than simply as an environmental attribute" (p. 614). This

distinction is supported by Leblebici and Salancik (1981) who speculated that uncertainty is also a function of the inability to predict outcomes. The number of possible decisions or outcomes, however, vary according to individual perceptions and individual uncertainty-tolerance levels (Duncan, 1972).

As in interpersonal relationships, the individual moves toward a working relationship in stages or phases (Feldman, 1976; Jablin, 1982; Louis, 1980; Van Maanen, 1978; Wanous, 1977; Wilson, 1984). Socialization occurs as an individual moves from the first phase of greatest uncertainty to subsequent phases of progressively lessened uncertainty. Some current studies (Jablin, 1982; Louis, 1980; Wilson, 1984) have indicated that because this transition is a process, the phases are not as discrete as had been believed nor perhaps always sequential since any one of the socialization phases may occur again as, for example, when an individual is promoted within an organization.

A Model of Communication Movement in the Socialization Process

Almost without exception the socialization phases proposed by the various researchers can be clustered into the following three modes of communication.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Intrapersonal Communication

The first third of the collective phases appear to fall into the category of intrapersonal communication. For example, Wilson's (1984) pre-entry and entry phases refer to the period beginning with initial awareness of the organization and ending with initial information-search behaviors. The objective during the pre-entry phase is to make predictions regarding the potential goodness of fit between the individual's and the organization's goals and needs. This phase is characterized by a high level of uncertainty as the individual attempts to present the most positive, but perhaps also the most unrealistic, picture of self. The entry phase is also characterized by a high degree of uncertainty; the individual is likely to be overloaded with information and consequently experiences a great deal of stress. The perceived stress acts to motivate the individual to reduce uncertainty through information-search behaviors.

Wilson's pre-entry and entry phases are conceptually similar to what other researchers have labeled anticipatory socialization (Feldman, 1976; Jablin, 1982; Van Maanen, 1976), pre-entry (Wanous, 1977), and entry and sense-making experiences (Louis, 1980).

During these collective phases, the individual appears to look internally in order to make sense of a new, uncertain environment. The communication strategies she/he uses are primarily cognitive ones rather than behavioral ones. Persons cope with this initial

uncertainty by calling upon past personal experiences in similar situations and by filtering information through personal sets of cultural or interpretive assumptions. Individual predispositions, characteristics, and/or traits play a major role in this initial enactment. Differences in self-esteem (Weiss et al., 1982), expectations (Jablin, 1984; Wanous, 1977), and reflexes, habits, convictions, sentiments, and intentions (Pfiffner & Sherwood, 1960) all affect the self-talk that must occur as an individual pinpoints and assesses his/her abilities, desires, and goals; makes choices about where to look for and how to obtain uncertainty-reducing information; and attempts to predict the possible outcomes of each choice.

Louis (1980) distinguished between the individual coping in familiar, more certain situations and individuals coping in unfamiliar, uncertain situations. In the former, preprogrammed cognitive scripts play a major role as persons act out everyday decisions and behaviors with a minimum of conscious thought. In the latter, uncertainty promotes a sense of something "out of the ordinary" (Louis, 1980, p. 239) that prompts a process of conscious inquiry that can only be described as intrapersonal communication or self-talk. A new organizational environment is certainly out of the ordinary and it evokes in individuals the need to enact their environment. This occurs when "the actor in the organization plays a major role in unrandomizing and giving order to the bewildering

number of variables . . ." (Weick, 1979, p. 45).

It is admittedly difficult to understand fully the workings of an individual's intrapersonal communication, or to pinpoint specific communication skills, but it obviously impacts their decisions, behaviors, and the communication strategies they choose when attempting to gather information to ease their transition into an organization. It is clear, however, that the intrapersonal communication mode is a necessary first step in the socialization process.

Interpersonal Communication

The socialization process requires more than personal sense-making through intrapersonal communication; it also requires task and social sense-making through interpersonal communication. Again almost without exception, the second third of the socialization phases proposed by reseachers deals with individuals attempting to conduct information searches to reduce uncertainty. In this respect, Feldman's (1976) accomodation phase, Van Maanen's (1976) encounter phase, Jablin's (1982) organizational encounter phase, Wanous's (1977) entry phase, and Wilson's (1984) learning and negotiation phases are similar. Because uncertainty is still relatively high, individuals ask questions, seek out relationships, observe cues, and generally attempt to "normalize the setting" (Jablin, 1982, p. 260). The individual strives to learn organizational goals and values and begins to sense opportunities

for innovation and influence. Adjustments begin to be made between the newcomer and the organization in order to facilitate the negotiation of roles and expectations.

This interpersonal interaction with others requires that individuals move from intrapersonal or cognitive strategies to interpersonal or behavioral strategies. Such behavioral strategies may include:

1. Ingratiation, which involves such behavior as self-presentation, favor-rendering, information-acquisition, and inclusion;
2. Behavior cycles, which involve interacting within the framework of organizational procedures that guide who the individual interacts with in order to obtain task information;
3. Boundary-spanning activity, which involves verbal and written interaction both within and without immediate work boundaries; and
4. Social integration, which includes interaction within the framework of informal organizational procedures through such activities as self-disclosure or compliance-gaining to enhance the likelihood that the other may view the interaction favorably.

To use any or all of these and other strategies successfully,

persons must have some specific communication skills. Because information-seeking in a new environment usually occurs interpersonally, that is, with one other person, some of the skills that have been pinpointed as being crucial to successful intimate relationships can also apply to the working relationship. These include:

1. Behavioral flexibility, which is the ability to adapt behavior and communication style from situation to situation. This skill is especially valuable when considering that a newcomer must deal effectively with superiors, peers, and subordinates, and must also deal with the paradox faced when making decisions about when to "push" and when to "back off."
2. Active listening, which is the ability to completely hear and understand another's verbal and nonverbal messages. While conducting information searches, an individual must be able to determine which persons are both knowledgeable and willing sources of information.
3. Descriptiveness, which is the ability to give and receive verbal feedback through specific and concrete statements. The individual who is able to specifically and concretely state task and

social information needs, and who is able to respond to statements or questions of assistance in a similar manner, has a greater chance of success.

4. Owning of thoughts/feelings, which is the ability to accept responsiblity for one's feelings, thoughts, and actions. To admit to feelings of uncertainty and doubt and to accept responsibility for one's own errors is to release energy that can then be focused on behaviors or actions that may reduce uncertainty and correct, or at least not compound, errors.
5. Openness, which is the ability to voluntarily tell one's thoughts and feelings to another individual. This skill is particularly important when seeking a place in the organization's social culture.

Together, these five communication skills allow the individual to ask for and receive important information clearly and accurately, while at the same time developing the informal or social ties that are necessary for success in an organization.

Organizational Communication

The last third of the phases proposed by researchers tend to revolve around organizational communication. For example, Wilson's (1984) mutuality and commitment phases are characterized by the

development and use of restricted codes, mutually acceptable relationship definitions, and the development of a psychological bond between individual and organization. Uncertainty is stabilized as values and goals are integrated and agreement is reached regarding expectations and responsibilities. This is consistent with Weiss et al. (1982) who concluded that as role uncertainty is reduced, newcomers enter a more stable period characterized by greater self-confidence and decreasing cognitive activity related to role definition.

The mutuality and commitment phases of Wilson's socialization model reflect Schein's (1968) transition to full-fledged member, Feldman's (1976) role management, Louis's (1980) adaptation, Van Maanen's (1976) metamorphosis, and Jablin's (1982) organizational metamorphosis.

At this point in the socialization process, intrapersonal and interpersonal communication or sense-making have been successfully combined and persons are now able to make sense "organizationally." Individuals have meshed with both formal and informal networks, have learned the organizational language, have internalized organizational norms, have committed to organizational goals, and perhaps most importantly, have developed a repertoire of successful uncertainty-reducing behaviors for future reference. Information, both task and social, is now processed through an organizational, as well as a personal, conceptual filter.

Within the organizational communication mode, several specific communication skills may be used. Writing and speaking skills, listening and descriptiveness skills, and analytical skills are all essential for continued success in the organization.

Implications

Organizations

Both the organization and the individual benefit from the expedient development and refinement of a good working relationship. Such a relationship begins with successful uncertainty reduction. Our communication perspective on organizational socialization stresses the importance of successful uncertainty reduction through specific communication modes and skills. If an individual fails to sufficiently reduce uncertainty, she/he may be plagued by role ambiguity and/or role conflict. Both ambiguity and conflict have been strongly associated with perceived stress (Caplan, 1980; Forbes, 1979; Pettegrew, 1980; Quick & Quick, 1984) which, in turn, has been linked to decreased performance and productivity, increased absenteeism and turnover, communication breakdowns, and faulty decision-making (Quick & Quick, 1984). Those communication processes which assist new organizational members with uncertainty reduction promote the development of a healthy and mutually acceptable relationship.

Our model would seem to be most useful in new employee orientation programs. Traditional practice has generally mandated

that orientation programs revolve around information regarding benefit packages, leave policies, etc. However, if the organization's goal is efficient and successful socialization, there is a need for orientation programs that define the parameters of the available task/social information-search actions from which new employees may select their options. For example, what are the formal rules for interacting? Are new employees free to ask task information from superiors other than his/her own? Are new employees free to cross office/department boundaries to obtain both task and social information? Central to these questions is another: Do new employees have the communication skills to seek out information? If not, the orientation program would seem to be the logical place to begin skill training.

Perhaps the most functional aspect of the model we have proposed is that it can be used to raise employee awareness that uncertainty is normal and natural, that there are ways available for reducing it, and that the transition from outsider to insider occurs only as a result of this multi-phase socialization and communication process.

Field of Speech Communication

A final implication of this model centers around the marriage of organizational communication and rhetorical criticism. In the same way that interpersonal relationship development theory can enhance our understanding of the socialization

process, so also can rhetorical criticism assist in expanding this understanding.

For example, Bitzer (1969) established three specific criteria which assist in both identifying and understanding a rhetorical situation. All of the criteria--the exigence, the audience, and the constraints--can be recognized within the proposed model and assist in showing how rhetorical criticism can aid in the understanding of the socialization process.

Bitzer defines the exigence as an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be. In the proposed model, uncertainty constitutes the exigence. It is an imperfection, a defect, a flaw which hinders an employee's integration into the company. Discourse, an essential element of the exigence, is imperative to the socialization process, and positive modification of the exigence is essential to a healthy company environment.

Bitzer's audience can be defined within the context of our model as the employees themselves, as well as other members of the organization. Employees are capable of being influenced by discourse, as in the case of a superior talking with a subordinate; all employees are also capable of being mediators of change in some way.

The third criteria discussed by Bitzer is that of constraints. He defines these as "persons, events, objects, and relations which

are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence" (p. 8). Within the constraints of an organizational environment, a number of behavioral strategies may be used. These include information-seeking, boundary-spanning, self-disclosure, ingratiation, and compliance-gaining, all of which contain the power to modify the exigence.

Bitzer (1969) also mentioned six specific characteristics or features of a rhetorical situation which can be found in the socialization process. The first three characteristics state that a rhetorical discourse is (1) called into existence by the situation, (2) invites a specific "fitting" response, and (3) somehow prescribes the response which fits. A new employee entering a company calls the problem of uncertainty reduction into existence. Survival of the individual within the organization (i.e., job security, promotions, etc.) and company protocol prescribe fitting responses and constraints.

The fourth and fifth characteristics state that rhetorical situations are located in reality and exhibit structures which are simple or complex and more or less organized, respectively. Organizational socialization is a component within companies and can be very complex or very simple while remaining somewhat organized (whether on paper or not).

The sixth and final characteristic is that rhetorical

situations come into existence, either mature or decay or mature and persist, and may conceivably persist indefinitely. One of the main goals for any new employee is to become socialized into the company; that is, to be accepted, to succeed, to advance, to take on organizational norms and roles, etc. In these cases, the rhetorical situation would mature and persist. On the other hand, the rhetorical situation may mature and decay as, for example, when some employees do not successfully complete the socialization process.

The three main criteria of the exigence (uncertainty), the audience (new employees and other organizational members), and the constraints (various behavioral strategies) are both present and fulfilled in our model.

Conclusion

We offer our model with the hope that it will allow for a greater understanding of (1) the movement from outsider to organizational member, and (2) the role which communication plays in this process. We realize that any model is an abstraction of the process it seeks to explain, and do not pretend to have accounted for all variables involved. However, emphasizing the role of communication modes in reducing uncertainty helped to pinpoint some specific communication skills that may enhance an individual's chances for successful socialization.

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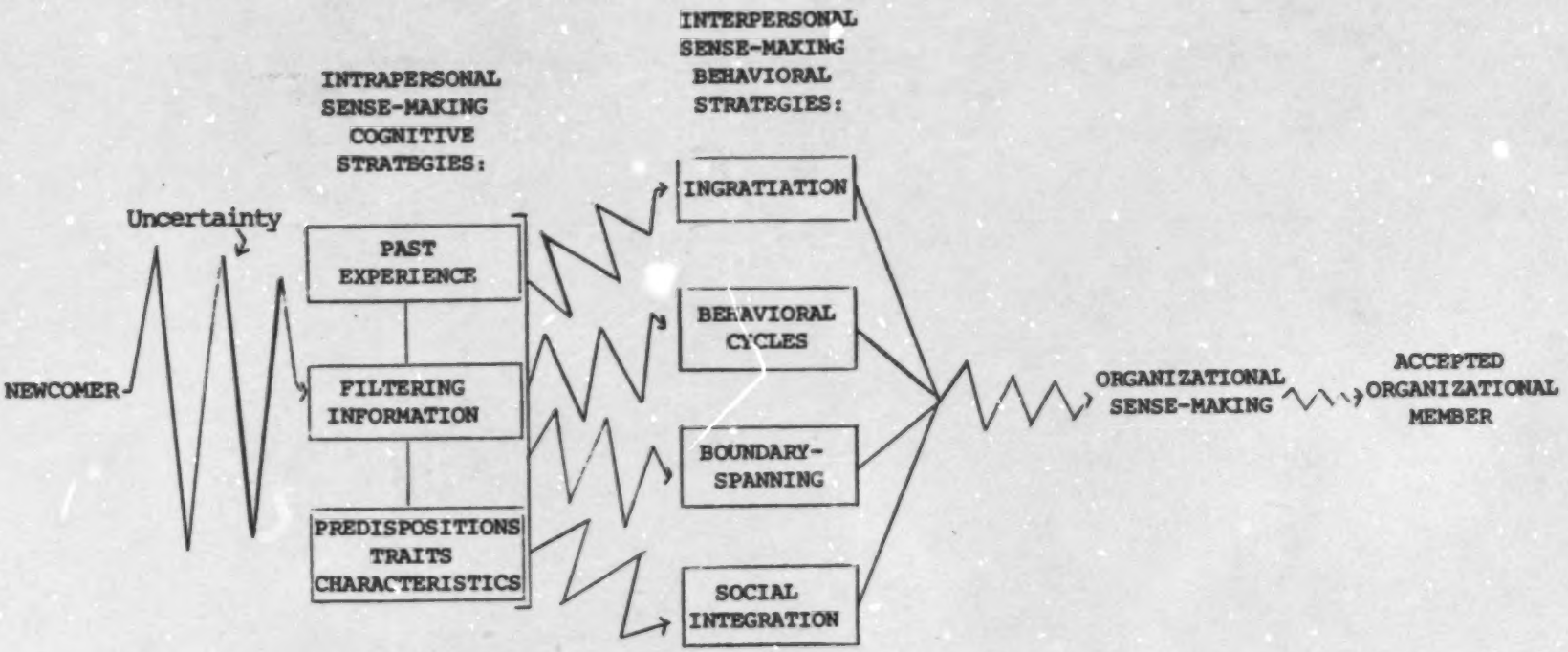
Figure Caption

Figure 1. Model of communication in the organizational socialization process.


INTRAPERSONAL SENSE-MAKING COGNITIVE STRATEGIES:
INTERPERSONAL SENSE-MAKING BEHAVIORAL STRATEGIES:
Uncertainty
NEWCOMER
PAST EXPERIENCE
FILTERING INFORMATION
PREDISPOSITIONS TRAITS CHARACTERISTICS
INGRATIATION
BEHAVIORAL CYCLES
BOUNDARY-SPANNING
SOCIAL INTEGRATION
ORGANIZATIONAL SENSE-MAKING
ACCEPTED ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBER